

NEW PUBLICATIONS.

SIR EDWIN ARNOLD'S JAPANESE DRAMA.
ADZUMA, OR, THE JAPANESE WIFE. A Play, in Four Acts. By Sir Edwin Arnold. 12mo. pp. 170. Charles Scribner's Sons.

Sir Edwin Arnold has found in "Adzuma" one of those subjects which he has always delighted to illustrate. The theme of the drama is one of the old Japanese legend so pregnant with information as to the age of chivalry in Nippon; it is also of chivalry, it is said, which, despite an inevitable mixture of ferocity, exhibits some of the higher virtues with a lustre and beauty scarcely equaled by the traditions of the corresponding stage of European development. In this case the whole of the action turns upon one of those supernatural occurrences which so typically beset the ancient annals of the land of the Mikado. The legend is based upon the theme of continued births and rebirths, the perils of individual character through various incarnations, and the influence of destiny upon human affairs. A beautiful girl—Adzuma—is married to a samurai named Wataru. They are deeply attached, and happy in their love, when young Morito, who had vowed to himself, had in a former life been a lover of Adzuma, appears upon the scene, and is at once fascinated by the young wife's loveliness. He might have escaped the snare, but that Sakamune—his herald but unrecognized enemy—undertakes to lure him on to his and Adzuma's destruction, and by craftily allured and forged letters persuades Morito that the lady reproaches his passion. Under the influence of his strong emotion the whole character of Morito suddenly deteriorates. He becomes brutal, masterful, crafty, pitiless. He dares to demand of Adzuma's mother—who is his aunt—that she shall assist him in his intrigue. Fooled to the top of his bent by his false friend Sakamune, he produces the forged letters to Adzuma's mother as positive proofs of what he asserts, and the misguided woman believes the so-called evidence.

The result is that Adzuma finds herself trapped. The conspiracy against her is so complicated, so cunningly contrived that there seems no escape from it consistent with the retention of her loved husband's confidence. There is, or so it seems to the poor hunted and outcast creature, but one possible means of baffling Morito, and this she adopts after the large manner of Japanese mediæval heroines. She tells Morito that if he desires to win her he must first kill her husband. He consents to this, and she gives him minute instructions how to proceed. She is to place a signal light in the room where her husband sleeps, to guide the assassin, who is to discover the identity of his victim by the circumstances that his hair will be wet after his bath. Everything thus arranged, Adzuma writes letters of farewell to her husband and her mother, contrives that the former shall pass the night in another room, and then, when he is asleep, cuts her own hair in masculine fashion, wets her head, and lies down in her husband's place. The calculated sequel occurs. Morito steals into the house at midnight, finds the wet-haired sleeper as directed, and with one blow of his sword strikes off the head—not, as he supposes, of Wataru, but of Adzuma. The story will be found in several modern translations of Japanese mediæval legends. It has a deep hold upon the popular imagination, and no wonder. Sir Edwin Arnold has not added much to the original legend, and has certainly detracted nothing from its impressiveness. His dramatic version is characterized by simplicity, occasional dignity of diction, frequent incursions into distinctly Japanese poetry and sentiment, and, generally speaking, a care in the maintenance of national ideas, figures and modes of thought, which testifies to both the skill and the conscientiousness of his labor.

In one instance, indeed, he commits a probably unconscious plagiarism, being tempted thereby to a curious confluence of circumstances. In the first scene of the fourth act Wataru speaking to Adzuma, says:

"An I loved not honor more than life—
Aye, more than Adzuma—I should not love Adzuma so well."

The author in writing this seems to have forgotten the noble lines of Richard Lovelace,

"I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honor more."

The fitness of the sentiment in the Japanese situation is indisputably obvious. But the resemblance between the expressions is perhaps too clear to pass unchallenged.

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